

stewards of the land. The Junior Ranger program is one such program that encourages America's youth to explore, protect, and learn about our national parks. Today, many national parks have active Junior Ranger programs. By visiting [nps.gov/webangers](http://nps.gov/webangers), young people can sign up to become WebRangers, enabling them to learn about different parks, monuments, and historic sites right from their homes.

Across the United States, the Federal Government plays a vital role in protecting our natural and historical treasures. My Administration launched the National Park Centennial Initiative to preserve and enhance these scenic wonders and to prepare for the 100th anniversary of the National Park Service in 2016. Serving as the Honorary Chair of the National Park Foundation, First Lady Laura Bush has also played a significant role in preserving our national parks. The First Lady is actively involved in programs such as First Bloom, which teaches children how to preserve native plants across America. In addition, this past Christmas, the White House highlighted our national parks with the theme "Holiday in the National Parks."

Our National Parks belong to each of us, and they are natural places to learn, exercise, volunteer, spend time with family and friends, and enjoy the magnificent beauty of our great land. During National Park Week and throughout the year, Americans of all ages can pledge to help maintain and enhance America's national treasures for future generations.

**Now, Therefore, I, George W. Bush,** President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim April 19 through April 27, 2008, as National Park Week. I invite all my fellow citizens to join me in celebrating America's national parks by visiting these wonderful spaces, discovering all they have to offer, and becoming active participants in park conservation.

**In Witness Whereof,** I have hereunto set my hand this fifteenth day of April, in the year of our Lord two thousand eight, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirty-second.

**George W. Bush**

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 8:58 a.m., April 17, 2008]

NOTE: This proclamation was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on April 16, and it was published in the *Federal Register* on April 18.

### **Remarks at a Welcoming Ceremony for Pope Benedict XVI**

*April 16, 2008*

Holy Father, Laura and I are privileged to have you here at the White House. We welcome you with the ancient words commended by Saint Augustine: *Pax tecum*. Peace be with you.

You've chosen to visit America on your birthday. Well, birthdays are traditionally spent with close friends, so our entire Nation is moved and honored that you've decided to share this special day with us. We wish you much health and happiness today and for many years to come.

This is your first trip to the United States since you ascended to the Chair of Saint Peter. You will visit two of our greatest cities and meet countless Americans, including many who have traveled from across the country to see with you and to share in the joy of this visit. Here in America, you'll find a nation of prayer. Each day, millions of our citizens approach our Maker on bended knee, seeking His grace and giving thanks for the many blessings He bestows upon us. Millions of Americans have been praying for your visit, and millions look forward to praying with you this week.

Here in America, you'll find a nation of compassion. Americans believe that the measure of a free society is how we treat the weakest and most vulnerable among us. So each day, citizens across America answer to the universal call to feed the hungry and comfort the sick and care for the infirm. Each day, across the world, the United States is working to eradicate disease, alleviate poverty, promote peace, and bring the light of hope to places still mired in the darkness of tyranny and despair.

Here in America, you'll find a nation that welcomes the role of faith in the public square. When our Founders declared our Nation's independence, they rested their

case on an appeal to the laws of nature and of nature's God. We believe in religious liberty. We also believe that a love for freedom and a common moral law are written into every human heart and that these constitute the firm foundation on which any successful free society must be built.

Here in America, you'll find a nation that is fully modern, yet guided by ancient and eternal truths. The United States is the most innovative, creative, and dynamic country on Earth. It is also among the most religious. In our Nation, faith and reason coexist in harmony. This is one of our country's greatest strengths and one of the reasons that our land remains a beacon of hope and opportunity for millions across the world.

Most of all, Holy Father, you will find in America people whose hearts are open to your message of hope. And America and the world need this message.

In a world where some invoke the name of God to justify acts of terror and murder and hate, we need your message that God is love. And embracing this love is the surest way to save men from falling prey to the teaching of fanaticism and terrorism.

In a world where some treat life as something to be debased and discarded, we need your message that all human life is sacred and that each of us is willed, each of us is loved—[applause]—and your message that each of us is willed, each of us is loved, and each of us is necessary.

In a world where some no longer believe that we can distinguish between simple right and wrong, we need your message to reject this dictatorship of relativism and embrace a culture of justice and truth.

In a world where some see freedom as simply the right to do as they wish, we need your message that true liberty requires us to live our freedom not just for ourselves but in a spirit of mutual support.

Holy Father, thank you for making this journey to America. Our Nation welcomes you. We appreciate the example you set for the world, and we ask that you always keep us in your prayers.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:38 a.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Pope Benedict XVI. The

Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

## **Joint Statement by the United States of America and the Holy See**

*April 16, 2008*

His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI and President George W. Bush met today in the Oval Office of the White House.

President Bush, on behalf of all Americans, welcomed the Holy Father, wished him a happy birthday, and thanked him for the spiritual and moral guidance, which he offers to the whole human family. The President wished the Pope every success in his Apostolic Journey and in his address at the United Nations, and expressed appreciation for the Pope's upcoming visit to "Ground Zero" in New York.

During their meeting, the Holy Father and the President discussed a number of topics of common interest to the Holy See and the United States of America, including moral and religious considerations to which both parties are committed: the respect of the dignity of the human person; the defense and promotion of life, matrimony and the family; the education of future generations; human rights and religious freedom; sustainable development and the struggle against poverty and pandemics, especially in Africa. In regard to the latter, the Holy Father welcomed the United States' substantial financial contributions in this area. The two reaffirmed their total rejection of terrorism as well as the manipulation of religion to justify immoral and violent acts against innocents. They further touched on the need to confront terrorism with appropriate means that respect the human person and his or her rights.

The Holy Father and the President devoted considerable time in their discussions to the Middle East, in particular resolving the Israel-Palestinian conflict in line with the vision of two states living side-by-side in peace and security, their mutual support for the sovereignty and independence of Lebanon, and their common concern for the situation in Iraq and particularly the precarious state of Christian communities there and